



Northfleet Technology College

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 118928
Local Authority Kent
Inspection number 280436
Inspection dates 7–8 December 2006
Reporting inspector Robin Hammerton HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Secondary	School address	Colyer Road
School category	Foundation		Northfleet
Age range of pupils	11–19		Gravesend DA11 8BG
Gender of pupils	Boys	Telephone number	01474 533802
Number on roll (school)	926	Fax number	01474 536122
Number on roll (6th form)	90		
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Stephen King
		Headteacher	John Hassett
Date of previous school inspection	29 November 1999		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11–19	7–8 December 2006	280436

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Introduction

The inspection was led by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors, working with three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This average-sized boys' school is non-selective, in a grammar school area. It has specialist technology college status, placing particular emphasis on science, mathematics, design and technology, and information and communication technology (ICT). Recently, there has been a significant reorganisation of the management and pastoral systems. Sixth form provision is made in partnership with other local schools. The majority of boys come from the local area, which contains some social deprivation. A high proportion is identified as having learning difficulties or disabilities (LDD). Most boys are White British, with about one in five from other ethnic groups, with many from Indian backgrounds. A few boys speak English as an additional language. A small but significant number are looked after by local authorities.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This school provides a satisfactory and steadily improving standard of education. It is a caring place and boys are looked after well. Standards are below average overall but boys achieve satisfactorily in relation to their starting points. However, there is variation between subjects. For example, standards are high in mathematics and physical education (PE). Conversely, progress is too slow, and standards low, in English and in design and technology (DT). This is unfortunate in view of the importance of literacy and the school's technology college status. However, ICT is used well across all subjects, which befits the specialist status.

Boys' personal development, including attendance and behaviour, is satisfactory. Some parents express concerns about behaviour whilst others consider it to be good. The boys say it has improved over time. Partly as a result, they are generally happy to be in school. They are polite, showing concern for others, and contribute to the school community through the new pastoral structure based on all-age learning communities. However, older boys regret that there are too few opportunities for sixth formers to be together as a group and receive the specific guidance and support they need. The sixth form provides, nevertheless, a good choice of appropriate courses and students' achievement is satisfactory. There is also a sound range of work-related courses in Key Stage 4, which has helped bring a notable rise in GCSE results at Year 11. Overall, in Key Stages 3 and 4, the curriculum is satisfactory.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory, with good and outstanding features in some subjects. Most lessons are well organised, with the boys knowing what they are expected to do and learn. The school has detailed data about each boy's attainment. In some lessons, this is used effectively, with work being well matched to the needs of all the boys. However, in the majority of lessons, this is not the case, which means that work can be too hard for some boys or, more often, not challenging enough for higher-attaining boys. Feedback to boys is not always specific enough to meet individuals' needs.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The new management structure, which has been introduced smoothly, is complex but provides a sound basis for the future. The college evaluates itself satisfactorily. The governing body, however, is insufficiently involved, not doing enough to support improvement or provide sufficient challenge to school leaders.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The sixth form also provides a satisfactory education. In recent years, standards in the sixth form have been well below average. Improvement is now taking place and achievement is satisfactory overall. This is caused by improving teaching and the development of additional work-related courses which match well the students' needs and aspirations. Students can access a wide range of courses from the other schools

in the local consortium and programmes at different levels can be tailor-made for them.

In the new structure, sixth formers are more integrated with other boys, especially through the mixed-age tutor groups. This creates a whole-school feeling but also a reduced sixth form identity which the students regret. There is no longer a member of staff with specific responsibility for the well-being of sixth formers, which contributes to the problem.

What the school should do to improve further

- Enhance the use of assessment data in lessons to provide work and individual feedback which better meets the needs of each boy.
- Raise standards in English and DT.
- Improve governance, so that the school is better challenged to improve and governors are more involved in monitoring and evaluating progress.
- Improve the pastoral support and guidance offered to members of the sixth form.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The boys' attainment on entry is below average. In Key Stage 3, they make satisfactory but inconsistent progress. By Year 9, achievement in mathematics and science is particularly good and standards are high. In English, however, progress is too slow and standards are low. At Year 11, most boys achieve 5 GCSE grades at A* to G, including English and mathematics. This is higher than the national average and very positive. In 2006, about two in every five students gained five GCSEs at grades A* to C. This is a considerable improvement on previous years, caused largely by the increased number of vocational courses. It shows satisfactory achievement in relation to boys' starting points. However, GCSE results in English fell. Standards are high in mathematics, PE and history but too low in English, music, business studies and DT. This concerns parents. Some potentially higher-attaining boys, whilst making satisfactory progress, could do better.

Boys generally reach the overall targets agreed with the local authority but these are not demanding enough, especially in English, to provide a strong impetus for higher standards. The whole area of target setting lacks some clarity as these overall targets do not match closely with boys' individual targets. There is some lack of distinction in practice between targets and predictions. This makes it harder to know how effectively each boy is being challenged. Nevertheless, the school maintains detailed data about boys' academic attainment. This is analysed to explain results honestly and as encouragingly as possible; but it is not as effectively used to contribute to further improvements in standards.

Boys with learning difficulties or disabilities make satisfactory progress. Indian boys slightly outperform other groups. Those who are looked after by local authorities make satisfactory progress, helped by their regular attendance. At age 16, some

higher-attaining boys transfer to other sixth forms in the consortium to take academic courses. The small number of A Level courses offered within the school lead to good outcomes, with students making satisfactory progress on the good and improving range of work-related courses.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The personal development and well-being of the boys are satisfactory. Their social skills, attitudes and self-esteem develop well in school, reflected in their satisfactory and improving attendance over the last four years. Sixth form attendance is slightly lower than in other year groups.

All boys are suitably prepared for the world of work and further education, though some weaknesses in their literacy skills detract from this. Behaviour is satisfactory overall, with good attitudes to learning shown in many lessons. Boys say that behaviour has improved but remain frustrated by disruption in a few lessons by a minority of boys. The parents' views also reflect this, although parents of younger boys are more positive. Boys in Years 7 to 11 are enthusiastic about the new learning communities. They say the school is a safe environment and that any instances of bullying are dealt with appropriately. Members of the school council feel that their ideas are valued and used to make a positive contribution. Charitable fund-raising is well organised but boys are less involved in wider community activities. Boys, including those who are initially reluctant, enjoy the sporting activities available and understand the importance of a healthy lifestyle. However, many choose not to eat a balanced diet in school, despite the appropriate menu available.

The boys' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory, with spiritual development being the weakest area due to a lack of opportunities for reflection.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall, but inconsistent. There is much good, and some outstanding, teaching but also some which is inadequate. Teaching is generally better in subjects such as mathematics where results are good and weaker in subjects with lower standards, such as DT.

Some aspects are more consistent, however. In almost all lessons, well-constructed learning objectives are shared with boys, helping them understand the point of their work. Most lessons proceed at a suitable pace and end with a meaningful plenary session. Teachers demonstrate secure knowledge of their subjects and courses, and

the content of lessons is relevant. Sound relationships prevail, behaviour is generally effectively managed and reluctant participants engaged. Support in lessons for boys with learning difficulties is satisfactory.

The best teaching is enthusiastic, conveying a sense of excitement to the boys. Teachers use questioning well to focus and develop boys' understanding. In some lessons, boys' individual learning needs are well known, with work and advice provided to meet the needs of each boy. However, in most lessons, this is not the case. Too often, all boys do the same work, feedback to them is rather general, and their individual targets are underused. This reduces expectations of many boys, especially those who could attain more highly. Where teaching is at its weakest, poorly chosen content and work pitched at the wrong level result in boys losing interest.

In the sixth form, teachers are knowledgeable and lessons well organised. Staff understand the learning needs of the students and make sure that most know what they should do to achieve the grades they aspire to.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

In Key Stage 3, a balanced and appropriate curriculum is offered. In response to low attainment in the subject, generous time is allocated to English. In Key Stage 4, a suitable vocational programme has been established. Work-related courses help raise ambition and match the boys' needs. However, although some boys take GCSE French in Year 9, very few boys go on to study a modern foreign language in Years 10 and 11.

Across the school, ICT skills and equipment are used resourcefully in most subjects. Personal, social and health education, including citizenship, is also provided satisfactorily through other subjects. Suitable provision is made for religious education (RE), though there is not an act of worship each day. The DT curriculum is weak, with insufficient emphasis on designing. Provision for PE is very good, with all boys included in worthwhile exercise and activities, some of which use off-site providers.

Boys with learning difficulties, and those who speak English as an additional language, can access the full curriculum. Special needs support is provided in a number of ways, including the well-organised Learning Support Unit, with several members of staff taking responsibility for different aspects. Boys who have particular abilities sometimes take courses and tests early, though their needs are not well met in all lessons. A developing range of opportunities for reinforcement of learning outside school time is provided, alongside a handful of more recreational activities. There are many opportunities for extra-curricular sport, including matches against other schools.

The sixth form curriculum is good. Rightly, it continues to develop from a traditional academic focus to a more balanced vocationally based programme. The range of sixth form extra-curricular and enrichment activities is sound.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

The school provides a safe and supportive environment. Individual boys are monitored and guided carefully, with specific mentoring provided if necessary. The new mixed-age tutor groups are already helping to develop social and interactive skills. The boys' opinions are taken seriously, which helps them feel that this is 'their' school. Regular surveys are used to gauge and respond to their views. Assessment data is used appropriately outside lessons by form tutors and other staff to guide the boys, most of whom know their individual academic targets. This is very positive, creating an explicit focus on standards and progress. However, the targets are rarely used well enough in lessons to help boys improve their work.

The quality of care, guidance and support provided to sixth formers is satisfactory and not as good as that for the other boys. It is weakened by the lack of specific sixth form tutorial provision. Some sixth formers do not always attend the mixed age tutor groups because they consider these are not consistently helpful enough.

Child protection procedures for all age groups are well established and reviewed regularly to meet changing requirements. There are very effective systems to support vulnerable boys. Every effort is made to keep in school any who are at risk of exclusion and to support actively those who have been excluded. Highly committed staff are often successful in re-engaging any boys who are unhappy in school. The comprehensive arrangements to help boys make choices about their future education or employment contribute to their future economic well-being.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The restructuring of the school since September has been managed smoothly. Each student is now placed in one of five learning communities, led by members of staff within a learning set (group of subjects). Staff are very enthusiastic about these complex changes, seeing better opportunities to share good practice, raise standards, use ICT in all subjects, and develop their skills and careers within the school. The changes have been underpinned by effective staff training opportunities, but are at an early stage. They provide a sound basis for improvement and a clear future course for the school.

Much of the detailed planning and leadership of these, and other, developments comes from the deputy headteacher responsible for teaching and learning. Other senior managers also provide strong direction in their areas of responsibility. The headteacher has a relaxed, unflustered style which involves and values others. Planning wonderful new buildings promised under the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) scheme, and ensuring that these are going to be just right for modern learning, is a priority for him.

He is clear about the strategic direction of the school whilst happy to trust the detailed implementation to others. This motivates staff but also leads to some weaker practice not being effectively enough addressed.

One instance of this is the lack of firmness in target setting. Another is that the role of the special educational needs co-ordinator is underdeveloped. The headteacher knows this but has accommodated it rather than dealt with it directly. This leads to a lack of clarity about who is responsible for some of the boys who require additional support. Similarly, the system for checking how well sixth formers' pastoral needs are met in the mixed-age tutorial groups is not sufficiently effective.

School self-evaluation is satisfactory. The strengths and weaknesses of teaching across the school are identified accurately by the appropriate deputy headteacher, who has also inspired some improvements. Assessment data is analysed in detail. Reasonable evaluations are produced for all subjects and evidence is kept well. However, in some areas, the school considers it is doing better than it is. This reduces the impetus to improve in those aspects. Self-evaluation information is nevertheless used to inform developments. For example, having identified the problem, the school is seeking to enhance provision in English. The main improvement plan is now briefer and better focused. However, it is not clear enough about how success will be measured, making it harder to evaluate progress rigorously.

Governance is inadequate. The governing body is suitably organised and has a committed chair, but is insufficiently active in self-evaluation and improvement planning. This was also a weakness at the last inspection. Governors' visits to the school are not purposeful enough. Whilst asking some pertinent questions, they are generally too ready to accept managers' reports and presentations, without challenging the school to improve further and faster.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	3	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3	
The behaviour of learners	3	
The attendance of learners	3	
How well learners enjoy their education	3	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	3

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	4	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you for making us welcome when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed meeting you and really liked your openness and sense of humour.

You are obviously proud of your school. Rightly so. We noticed the school's sense of togetherness, helped by the five new communities. It is a caring and friendly place and you are looked after well. It was good to see how well you get on together and with the staff. We were pleased to hear you say that behaviour is getting better all the time and that school is a safe place to be. We also particularly liked the way ICT is used in many lessons and subjects and we could see that you all get the chance to do enjoyable activities and get good exercise in PE. Many of you play matches against other schools, which is terrific.

Overall, the school provides a satisfactory education and is improving. Your test and exam results are reasonably good – and very good in some subjects like mathematics. Well done! However, in some other subjects, like English and DT, results are not high enough and we have asked the school to work with you to make them better. Most of you get some GCSEs, which is important for your futures. You all take vocational courses from Year 10, which is good. The school gives you helpful advice about the choices you have to make. The new mixed-age tutor groups seem to be off to a sound start, although we know that those of you in the sixth form would like to have some more time just for yourselves. We have asked the school to provide that for you and give you even better support.

Most of you know your targets, which give you something to aim for. We are asking your teachers to make more use of these targets, and their assessments of you, to help you to learn faster in lessons. The governing body also needs to get more involved in the school.

It's really good that the staff want to know what you are all thinking through questionnaires and the school council, for example. Make sure you keep on giving your opinions politely and positively as this will help the school to keep on getting better.

With best wishes for the future